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SUBJECT: LEBANON: CODEL PEOSI MEETS SPEAKER NABIH BERRI

Classified By: Chistopher W. Murray, Charge d'Affaires. Reason: Sct
ions 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Lebanese Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri told CODEL Pelosi on April 2 that it is the lack of Shia representation in the cabinet, and not the international tribunal, that is the real crux of the Lebanese political crisis. Berri refuses to convene a formal session of Parliament or work with the illegitimate cabinet, claiming that such a step would cause the Parliament to lose its legitimacy or the opposition deputies to resign. Lebanon's problems are primarily internal, and Berri said, and recommended that the United States help find a solution by pressuring Saad Hariri to continue his dialogue with Berri, as well as by engaging Syria and Iran to solve problems in the region. Berri claimed to have no knowledge of the welfare or whereabouts of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers but agreed to "ask" about their well-being. End Summary.

EXCLUSION, NOT THE TRIBUNAL,
THE SOURCE OF THE STALEMATE

¶2. (C) Nabih Berri, Shia Speaker of Parliament and leader of the Amal Movement, hosted a working lunch on April 2 for CODEL Pelosi. The CODEL was led by Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi (CA); and comprised Representatives Tom Lantos (CA), Henry Waxman (CA), Nick Rahall (WV), David Hobson (OH), Louise Slaughter (NY) and Keith Ellison (MN). The Charge, PolChief, and Pol-Ecnoff accompanied the CODEL.

¶3. (C) Speaker Pelosi asked Speaker Berri to share his insights into the political stalemate in Lebanon. Berri explained that each democracy is distinct, and with 18 religious communities in Lebanon it is essential that the government not exclude any one group. "That, and not the international tribunal, is the real problem," Berri said, complaining that the March 14 majority allowed Amal and other groups only two days to translate and study the 30-page draft tribunal legislation. Berri boasted that he was among the first to suggest an international tribunal with a mandate inside Lebanon, following the example of Sierra Leone, and to call for a national dialogue. But two days was not a fair opportunity for the Cabinet to consider the Tribunal documents, Berri said, and the Shia Cabinet ministers responded by resigning.

A LEGITIMATE PARLIAMENT MUST NOT
WORK WITH AN ILLEGITIMATE CABINET

¶4. (C) The Cabinet lost its legitimacy when the Shia and pro-Lahou cabinet ministers resigned, Berri opined; while still a functioning entity, the Cabinet will not be legitimate until all communities are once again represented there. Holding a Cabinet meeting without Shia ministers present would be like holding congressional elections without the participation of several large states, Berri analogized.

¶5. C) Parliament is not closed, Berri said, since the Speaker and the parliamentary committees are still meeting. He admitted however that he will not call for a formal session or allow the parliamentary committees to consider any new legislation referred from an "illegitimate" Cabinet. If he did call for a formal parliamentary session, Berri speculated, perhaps the 57 opposition deputies would walk out, causing the Parliament to also lose its legitimacy.

¶6. (C) Speaker Pelosi reasoned that no one person can decide whether a government is legitimate or not, and that the international community does not see any Lebanese effort to fix this problem. Pelosi argued that the international community might conclude that if the Parliament isn't legitimate, then the Speaker isn't legitimate. In addition, Congresswoman Slaughter, head of the Rules Committee, proposed that Berri use the Chamber of Deputies' rules and procedures to push for a resolution to the political stalemate.

LEBANON'S PROBLEMS ARE INTERNAL

¶7. (C) Berri claimed that the United States wrongly blames

* Missing Section 002 *
